

The Role of Education in Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Policy

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“The Role of
Education in Nonpoint
Source Pollution
Control Policy”

by Marc O. Ribaud
and Richard D. Horan

For more information
contact Marc Ribaud at
mribaud@ers.usda.gov

<http://www.ers.usda.gov>

Education is often used to provide agricultural producers with information on how to operate more efficiently with current technologies, or with information on profitable new technologies that generate less pollution. When education is successful, it provides a “win-win” solution where both producers and the environment benefit.

While such “win-win” solutions are attractive, this article describes a simple economic framework to show that education cannot be considered a strong tool for water quality protection. Successful water quality protection through education depends on a number of factors related to profitability and altruism. When producers have little concern for environmental quality, expected net returns must be positive before those producers will adopt practices that will improve water quality. Even when a producer has altruistic motives, these feelings may not be strong enough to result in the desired change in water quality. Evidence suggests that net returns are the chief concern of producers when they adopt alternative management practices. Because relatively few management practices exist that simultaneously increase expected net returns and improve water quality, expectations that education can be an effective water quality policy tool are limited. Education’s greatest value may be as a component of a pollution control policy that relies on other tools such as incentives and direct regulation.

